

Play and Youth Sufficiency in Jarrow

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Working Group
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What is play and youth sufficiency?

- The concepts of play sufficiency and youth sufficiency both concern whether children and young people have adequate opportunities to thrive within their communities
- Play sufficiency refers to whether children have sufficient time, space, permission and opportunity to play as part of everyday life
 - An idea developed out of work to embed children's right to play (established in Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child) in policy and practice
 - Considers whether neighbourhoods offer accessible, inclusive and stimulating environments where children can engage in freely chosen, self-directed play, particularly outdoors
- Youth sufficiency, by contrast, is broader. It concerns whether young people have adequate access to the social, physical and structural conditions that enable them to flourish as they move toward adulthood. This includes education, health, safety, relationships, participation in decision-making, and access to supportive services and facilities
- For the purposes of the report, in relation to youth sufficiency, we narrow our scope to one critical and often overlooked dimension: young people's access to informal, freely accessible places to gather and play, spaces to "hang out"
- Questions of play and youth sufficiency cannot be separated from questions about social and spatial justice and the right of young people to exist visibly and legitimately within public space

Play and Pride in Place

- Both play policy and youth policy are the focus of considerable attention currently – new government youth strategy, and Play Commission, Play England's 10 Year Strategy, and APPG Play
- United Nations [Guide to Creating Urban Public Spaces for Children](#)
- There is a developing debate about the place of play in the Pride in Place programmes, with [Play England](#) and others drawing attention to the possible synergies in this sphere and asking Pride in Place boards [to commit 20% of their funding to children's play](#)
- Longstanding play and playwork research underlines that children's and young people's play is the primary way in which they develop a connection to and a sense of belonging in their communities: "play is the principal way in which children participate within their own communities" ([Lester and Russell, 2010](#), x)

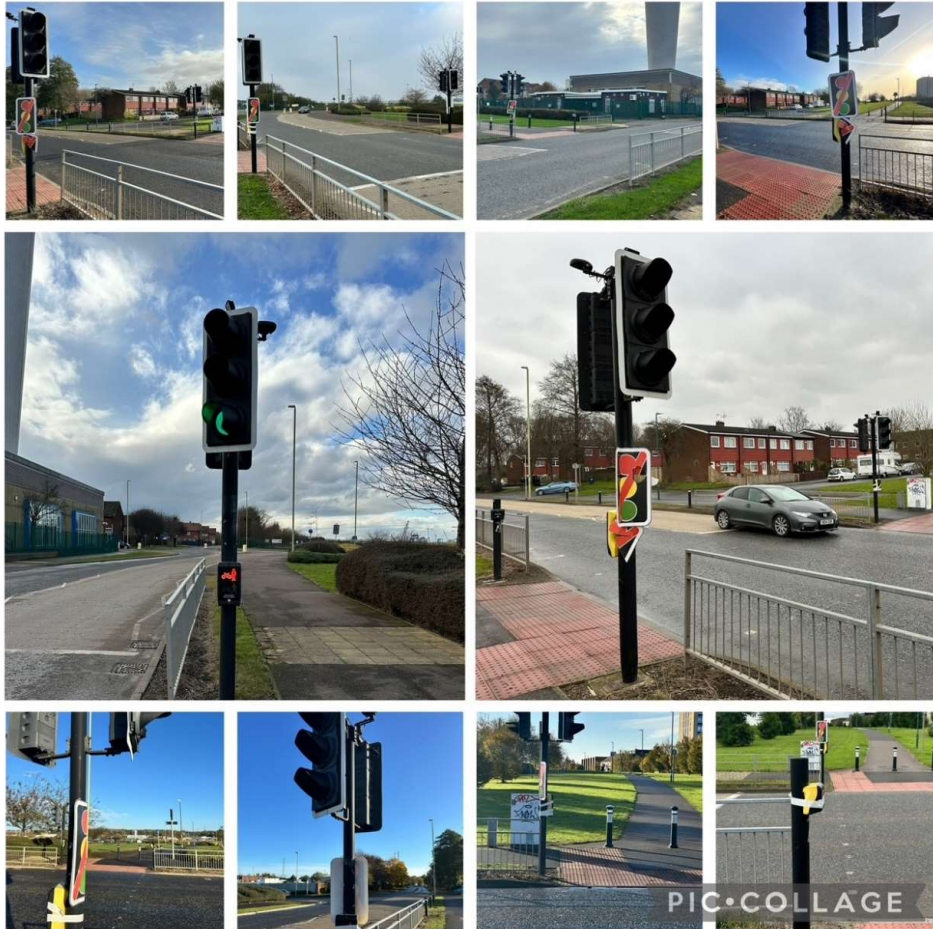
We can argue that play (broadly defined) is how children and young people develop pride in their places.

The Research

- Two interconnected projects, funded largely by Newcastle University and related foundations
 - Neighbourhood play in South Tyneside
 - Play and youth sufficiency in Jarrow
- Professor Alison Stenning (Newcastle University), Paula Turner (Leverhulme Fellow and Artist), Alison Burden and Michelle Trotter (former executive head and headteacher Dunn St Primary), Gemma Lockyer (NE Youth), Gerard New (Tyneside Outdoors), and Jackie Boldon (independent play and youth work consultant)
- November 2023 to July 2025 (though many of us have a longer relationship with Jarrow)
- We worked in schools, with children and young people, with parents and carers, and in conversation with youth and play providers, council officers, and elected members
- We played – and did observational work, pop-up play and youth work events, mapping and documenting, exploring historic play in Jarrow, a small-scale survey, interviews – and took a trip to Shiremoor Adventure Playground
- Focus here on neighbourhood, outdoor and less-structured play in public space

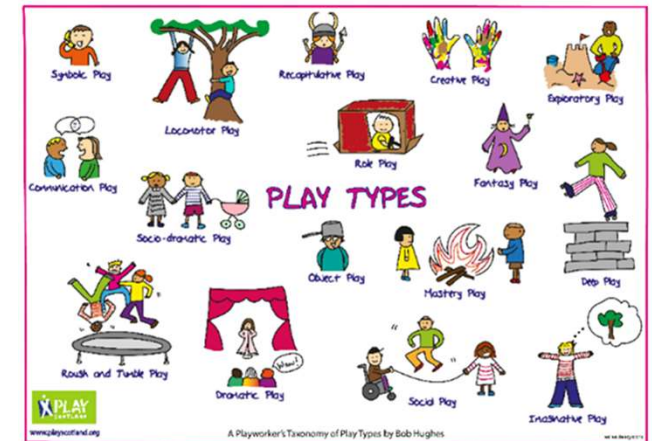


PLAY AND YOUTH SUFFICIENCY IN JARROW



What is play for Jarrow's children and young people?

- At primary age, children listed diverse forms of play: digital, physical, structured, sporting, passive, active, social, imaginative, creative, serious and silly.
- They described seamless connections between their digital play and their 'real world' play, playing with friends online (together or at a distance) and drawing their digital play into their physical and social play.
- When we spent time with them in and around school grounds, we saw them take every opportunity to play: they revelled in opportunities to play.
- The younger children we worked with primarily saw play as fun and as social, but they also recognised that play was linked to new skills, to family and other relationships, and to being well.
- At secondary age, play was increasingly characterised as **hanging out**, in their neighbourhoods, near school, on public transport, in the town centre and other local centres, but many still identified particular forms of play – e.g. football, music, fishing, gymnastics, etc. – that they valued.
- The older children valued play as a way of having fun, being with friends, doing what makes them happy, being outdoors, and getting fresh air.



play as “less an activity and more just a state of being” (Thomson and Philo 2004, 112)

“instead of actively playing ... children were resting, socializing, hanging out, sitting, watching or talking to other children” (Helleman, Nio and de Vries 2023, 329)

Where do Jarrow's children and young people play and hang out?

- Most of the children and young people we worked with, from late primary onwards, told us that they are permitted to play out without adult supervision.
- For some, this was shaped by certain conditions, including being with friends or family, staying close to home, maintaining contact (and location-sharing) via their phones, and returning before dark.
- There were more restrictions in bad weather and on winter afternoons.
- Some children noted that their parents' anxieties, particularly about strangers and social risks, limited their ability to play out, and this was especially true for younger children and for more vulnerable communities (such as migrants and asylum seekers).

Younger children (Dunn St)

- The "three swing park" (Ferry St)
- Charlie's (Drewetts) Park
- Outside front door/on street at home or near friends' homes
- The court (MUGA) and Saxon (toddler) Play Area on Priory Road
- The library at Jarrow Focus
- Jarrow Skate Park
- Viking Centre
- West Park

- Den building



Older children and young people

- West Park (including the bandstand)
- Biking around Jarrow
- Viking Centre
- Valley View/Monkton Dene/Primrose Park
- Streets and alleyways – "kicking about the council estates"
- Green spaces near school
- Jarrow Metro
- The slake and the Don
- Charlie's (Drewetts) Park
- Jarrow Skate Park
- The pedestrian and cycle tunnel
- The riverside (including for fishing)

Dunn St Primary – Play Priorities

1	Better courts/MUGAs for all kinds of games	Our neighbourhood needs to be cleaner and tidier	There should be more time to play at school	Make it safer for us to walk or cycle (without an adult) to places to play
2	Adults need to know why play is so important so that they don't complain when we play out	Better space for adults (e.g. benches) while we play	Take down the "No Ball Games" signs	Our neighbourhood needs to be cleaner and tidier
3	Let us hang rope swings on trees	Make it safer for us to walk or cycle (without an adult) to places to play	We need places we can play outdoors, even when it's really hot, really cold, really wet or really dark	We just need more spaces to hang out outside safely and comfortably
4	There should be more time to play at school	Build an adventure playground	Make it safer for us to walk or cycle (without an adult) to places to play	Build an adventure playground
5	We just need more spaces to hang out outside safely and comfortably	Adults need to know why play is so important so that they don't complain when we play out	We should have more time to play before and after school	At school, all the playgrounds should have as much play stuff as the early years' playground

Older children and young people: hopes and concerns

- Having places to go and just hang out
- More public play equipment, for older children
- Concerns around safety (including bullying)
- Being able to get around by bike
- Better bike facilities (BMX and mountain bike trails, bike repair)
- Safely getting to friends' houses
- "People to play games with us": youth workers and playworkers
- Toilets and water fountains
- Covered/sheltered seating areas
- Conflict between different groups and different age groups
- Road risks
- Adult disapproval
- Intergenerational activities
- Girl-friendly spaces and possibilities
- More events and options in parks

Parent and carer perspectives

- The state of playgrounds (quality of equipment, poor maintenance)
- Desire for play and youth workers in parks and public space to support and engage children and young people
- Not knowing what's available and accessible
- Behaviour of older children
- Cost of paid activities
- Travel to opportunities across Jarrow/the borough – cost and time
- Social safety (especially for more vulnerable groups)
- Struggles to find spaces for sibling groups of different ages
- More spaces and opportunities for diverse needs and interests

Stakeholder perspectives

- Children and young people assumed/expected by adults to be misbehaving
- Long walks to parks – safety aspect for parents
- Pressures on parents/carers from long working hours
- Older kids on metro
- Removal of play space for housing development (e.g. MUGA on Scotch Estate)
- Perceptions of ASB (e.g. parks, estates, metro stations)
- Cohort of children (13-18) without access to youth provision as a result of austerity and covid
- Loss of playworkers, despite continuing support for youth work and youth services
- Safety in public spaces and parks, especially for girls and young women
- Underutilised spaces in parks (e.g. vacant buildings)
- "Friends of" parks trying to support children and young people

Recommendations – Play England's Framework for Change

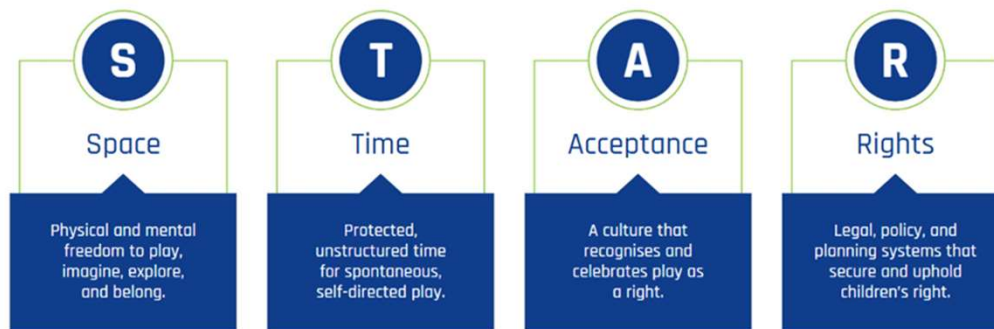
Framework for Change

STAR Framework for Implementing the Right to Play

The right to play is universal and non-negotiable, as established by Article 31 of the UNCRC and General Comment 17. To realise this right, children's needs must be met across four essential areas: Space, Time, Acceptance and Rights — the STAR framework.

Together, these conditions form the foundation of a society where play is visible, valued, accepted and protected.

The STAR frameworkTM was created by Dr Naomi Lott, Lecturer in Law at the University of Reading. It offers a practical, rights-based model for creating a society where play is no longer a privilege, but a universal reality for every child.



<https://www.playengland.org.uk/strategy>

Space

- Pay attention to children's doorstep spaces (cleanliness, risks and hazards, etc.)
- Play-friendly neighbourhood spaces with opportunities to develop child-led play and just hang out, safely and comfortably in all weathers and all seasons (lighting, benches, shelters)
- Improve play value and permission to play in and around the Viking Centre
- Ensure safe everyday mobility for children and young people, by tackling road danger and maintaining and developing pedestrian and cycle infrastructure
- Repair damage to play parks as a matter of priority, and improve the quality of provision (especially for over 8s)
- Promote neighbourhood play with support from youth and play workers, improving safety and extending opportunities
- Build an adventure playground
- Develop a play streets programme

Time

- Embed play even more consistently in the school day, including for older children (late primary and early secondary)
- Enable 'play on the way' to make the most of small bits of time (on the way to school, at the shops, etc.)
- Integrate play strategy into child poverty work, in the hope that parents' time might be freed up to facilitate children's play
- Create spaces that enable neighbourhood play in bad weather and darker afternoons, extending the play day and all-seasons play
- Make neighbourhood play possible in all seasons

Acceptance

- Remove all No Ball Games signs
- Work with community and resident groups and other stakeholders, across a range of neighbourhoods and circumstances, to explore and embed the value of everyday play, including for older children and teenagers
- Develop a pro-play policy within the council, such that the council and its officers start from a premise that play should be permitted

Rights

- Integrate children's right to play (Article 31 of UN Convention on the Rights of the Child) into a full range of council policy and practice
- Embed the right to play in child poverty work, acknowledging the impact that poverty has on realising children's right to play
- Explore the possibility of adopting a play sufficiency approach to put the right to play into practice
- Ensure that more children with additional needs, children from migrant and refugee families, and others with protected characteristics are equally able to access space to play

An Adventure Playground for Jarrow

- An extraordinary play space – child-led, risky, free, and enabled by playworkers
 - “They are distinct, staffed spaces that enable child-led, freely chosen play supported by skilled playworkers. They create the conditions for managed risk, independence, inclusion and year-round community connection.” (Play England)
- Founded on principles of playwork and acting as beacons of play and playwork
- Community-based spaces, with focus on relationships
- An umbrella for the delivery of other services
 - Family support, safeguarding, poverty alleviation etc. (food banks, advice, etc.)
 - Some develop a “hub-and-spoke model” building out from the adventure playground
- Space for home educated children, children with additional needs, and others
- Focus on communities facing multiple social and economic challenges
- Only one in the whole of the North East

- Every £1 invested in an adventure playground generates an estimated £1.32 in social benefits over a 20-year period, and every £1 invested in qualified playwork staff generates an estimated £200 in social benefits over the same period (Matrix, 2010; <https://www.playengland.org.uk/appg/feb2026>)

